

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Sansevieria pinguicula - the 'walking' Sansevieria

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Walker, Colin (2021). Sansevieria pinguicula - the 'walking' Sansevieria. Cactus & Succulent Review(31) pp. 17–20.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](https://oro.open.ac.uk)



Fig.1 *Sansevieria pinguicula* in a 27cm diameter pan

# Sansevieria pinguicula – the ‘walking’ Sansevieria

by Colin C. Walker

*Sansevieria* is a genus in which 86 species were recognised by Newton (2020), this being the most recent survey of the genus. Additions since then bring the current total to around 90 species. Many of these are large-growing and hence need a reasonable amount of space to accommodate them.

I grow most of my sansevierias as house or conservatory plants and provide them with winter warmth and water all year round. My *Sansevieria* collection is mostly accommodated in a range of ceramic pots or other unglazed pots making them a doubly attractive feature of the windowsills.

*Sansevieria pinguicula*, the species showcased here, is very distinctive and relatively slow-growing making it a choice collectors' item. It was first described in 1964 by Peter Bally, the renowned student of East African succulents, from plants he discovered in the Tana River region of Kenya. Today it is still known as having a restricted distribution and is endemic to the Coast Province in eastern Kenya where it occurs on sandy plains with open bushland at 120–230m (Newton, 2020).

Bally named his new species *pinguicula* from the diminutive of the Latin *pinguis* meaning fat, for the somewhat fattish





Fig. 2

*Sansevieria pinguicula* in a 20cm diameter pot

leaves. Indeed, the chunky succulent leaves are what make this plant so appealing (Fig.1).

It has short erect stems that branch via runners to produce rosettes of up to seven or eight leaves. The leaves are up to 30cm long in cultivation, slightly flattened on the upper surface with a broad channel almost the width of the leaf and edged with a reddish-brown margin. The lower surface of the leaf is rounded with two or three narrow grooves. The leaves are tough, edged with a horny margin and taper to terminate in short but very sharp terminal spines. Colour is an intense blue-green which fades with ageing and the surface is slightly rough. There is no cross-banding at any stage of growth, a feature that is a characteristic of the leaves of many other sansevierias.

I have grown this species for nearly 20 years. My first plant was very successful on the show bench and accumulated a number of awards. Its greatest accolade was that it won first prize in the restricted pot-size class for a *Sansevieria* at the 2012 BCSS National Show. Fig. 1 shows the same plant four years later in a specially

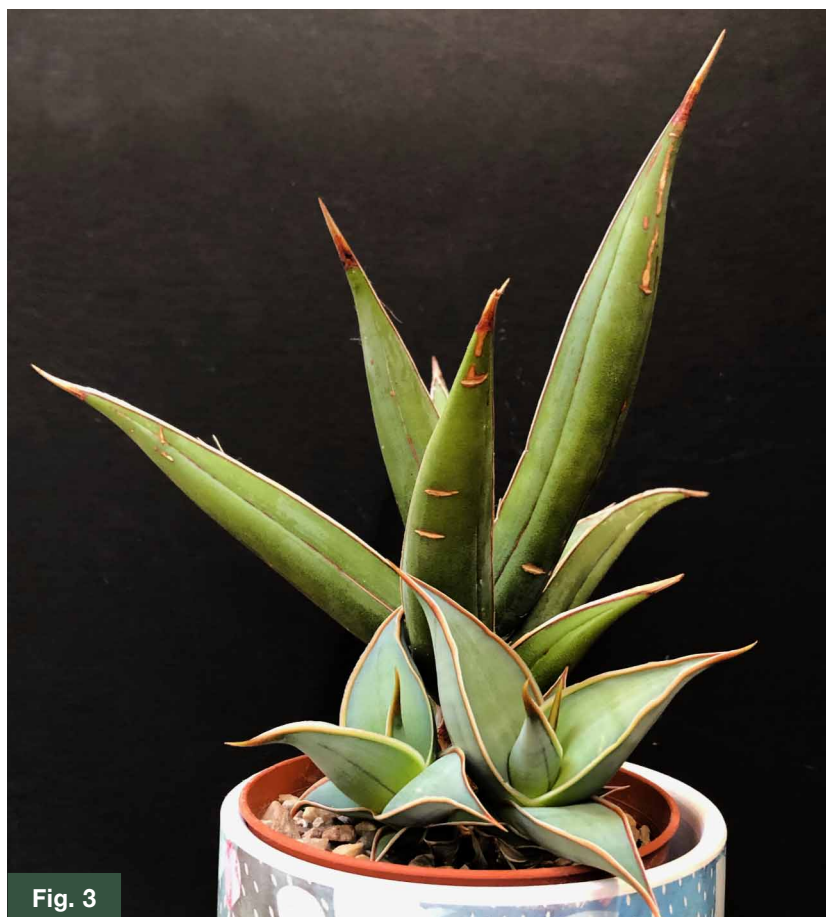


Fig. 3

Offsets on a rooted cutting of *S. pinguicula* in a 10cm diameter pot

## *Sansevieria pinguicula* – the ‘walking’ *Sansevieria* continued

purchased larger black-glazed pan. Sadly this plant is no longer with me since it succumbed to low or even freezing temperatures following an unexpected greenhouse heating failure. The only plants that suffered were half a dozen sansevierias which should not have been left in the greenhouse – lesson learned!

The plant has a very distinctive growth pattern (Fig. 2). It spreads by sending out horizontal runners or stolons not covered

with sheaths in the manner akin to that of a strawberry plant. The new growth then sends roots into the ground at a raised position, thus making the plant look as if it is growing on stilts. As a consequence of this, the plant is known as the ‘walking’ *Sansevieria* in Kenya.

My second plant came to me from the collection of the late Gordon Rowley who obtained it in 1993 from the *Sansevieria* expert Juan Chahinian who, in turn, had



**Fig. 4**

*Sansevieria pinguicula* in flower



previously obtained it from Peter Bally. This plant may be type material but I have no concrete evidence to confirm this suggestion.

I have propagated the plant shown in Fig. 2. A rooted cutting potted on has produced exceptionally fast growth in my experience and has itself produced two offsets after six months of growth (Fig. 3). I suggest the reason for this is that the plant lives on a sunny south-facing windowsill above a radiator, so it has been provided with near optimal growing conditions.

In all my years of growing this species just a single plant has flowered (Fig. 4). The spike was simple, unbranched and no more than 10cm tall. It is, however, described as producing branched panicle inflorescences up to about 30cm tall. The flowers are arranged in dense clusters with up to six flowers per cluster (Fig. 5). Individual flowers are relatively small for a *Sansevieria*, being less than 1cm long. The lobes are white with a brown mid-stripe. I detected very little scent which again is unusual for a *Sansevieria* which usually have intense hyacinth-like scents that can fill the air of a living room. Notice too that many droplets of nectar are produced at the base of the flowers, presumably acting as rewards for their nocturnal pollinators, most likely moths. The nectar often drips onto the leaves making them sticky.

In the last decade *S. pinguicula* has been shown to be more diverse than previously understood following the description of two distinctive infraspecific taxa. Plants with a distichous, as opposed to rosulate, leaf arrangement were originally described in 2012 as *S. pinguicula* subsp. *disticha*. This has shorter leaves, up to only 15cm long, that curve upwards. This and the typical subspecies, however, have been found growing together and so it was downgraded in status and is now *S. pinguicula* f. *disticha* (Newton & Thiede, 2015).

Another form also with shorter, dark green leaves and white flowers was named in 2013 as *S. pinguicula* var. *nana*, the name meaning ‘dwarf’. This grows some distance from the type locality for the species, however, and its status was upgraded and became *S. pinguicula* subsp. *nana* (Newton & Thiede, 2015).

Finally a note on another name change for the species. There has been growing



Fig. 5

Close-up of the flowers of *Sansevieria pinguicula*

evidence that the genera *Dracaena* and *Sansevieria* do not merit separate status, although this is still a very controversial issue and many commentators prefer to retain these as separate entities, at least for now. If you adopt the ‘lumper’ approach then the species showcased here has become *Dracaena pinguicula*. ■

Photos: Colin C. Walker

#### References

- Newton, L.E. (2020) *Sansevieria* Ruscaceae. In U. Eggli & R. Nyffeler (eds.) *Monocotyledons. Vol. 2: Families Bromeliaceae to Xanthorrhoeaceae. Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants*, Springer, Berlin, pp. 1353–1385.
- Newton, L.E. & Thiede, J. (2015) Rank adjustments for the infraspecific taxa of *Sansevieria pinguicula* P.R.O.Bally (Asparagaceae/Dracaenaceae). *Cact. Succ. J. (U.S.)*, **87**: 28–32.